

LOWELL

THE SIGN BOOK



THE SIGN BOOK

**Lowell
Division of
Planning and
Development**

and

**Lowell
Historic
Preservation
Commission**

**Lowell
Massachusetts**

Acknowledgments

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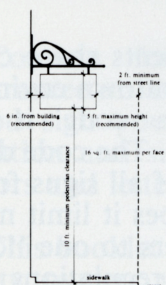
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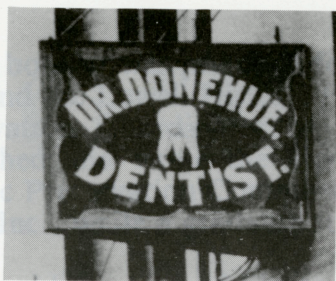
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INTRODUCTION



Signs are one of the most prominent visual elements of a street. If well designed, they add interest and variety to building facades and attract customers. On the other hand, signs more than any other single feature can detract from even the most attractive storefront if erected without care.

On January 29, 1980 the City of Lowell adopted its first comprehensive ordinance regulating the design and use of signs throughout the city. The sign code is part of the zoning ordinance and is administered according to its provisions. In adopting this ordinance the City Council reaffirmed the importance of adequate protective measures for Lowell's nationally recognized historic buildings.

Downtown Lowell is undergoing a dramatic revitalization. Individual store owners are taking an active part in this effort, realizing that the distinctive architecture of their buildings helps to draw people to their stores.

Merchants are rehabilitating their buildings, peeling off layers of previous "improvements" to reveal early storefront details which lie beneath. Where original storefronts no longer exist, they are being replaced with sensitively designed new materials which are compatible with the original building facades. New signage is an important part of many of these storefront improvements.



Fairburn Building, circa 1915

City officials and residents share concern for an attractive downtown environment. The Lowell sign code is an outgrowth of this concern. The code does not suggest the removal of all signs from downtown Lowell, nor does it limit merchants and building owners to one "correct" type of sign. The regulations are primarily concerned with governing the height, size, and number of business signs in an effort to eliminate the visual clutter and inefficiency resulting from uncontrolled signage.

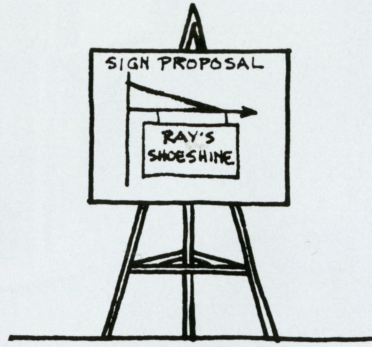


Collection of Helen Barr

Concern for size alone does not guarantee an attractive sign. To design a good sign you must carefully consider location and size, shapes and materials, colors and lettering styles.

This booklet was prepared to help property owners with the new code. It is hoped that the information presented here will enable you to design and put up the best possible sign for your building with the least amount of trouble or delay.

The booklet is divided into three sections. Section One describes **regulations** contained in the Lowell sign code and briefly outlines the sign permit application process. Section Two offers **design guidelines** for creating signs that will both enhance the image of your business and be compatible with your building and the surrounding street environment. Section Three is an appendix containing additional **technical information** and sources of further assistance.



What Is A Sign?

Most people think of a sign as a board with letters spelling out the name of a business and perhaps the product or service which it sells. However, according to the sign code which is part of the Lowell zoning code, a sign may be many things. It defines a "sign" as:

...a structure which consists of a device, light, letter, word, model, banner, pennant, trade flag, logo, insignia, or representation which advertises, directs, or announces a use conducted, goods, products, services or facilities available...



An example of a well designed neon sign.



A logo can be incorporated into an effective sign.



Signage can be an integral part of a building structure.



This sign is in keeping with the period of the building.

When Does the Sign Code Apply?

All new signs within the City of Lowell must comply with sign code regulations. The code is enforced by the Building Department. You must obtain a permit to erect a sign.

Special care should be used if an existing sign is to be changed, especially if it was put up prior to the sign code and does

not conform to its requirements (a non-conforming sign as defined in the code).

If a sign is enlarged, it must comply with the code. If it is repaired or changed in any other way and the costs to do this exceed 35% of replacing the sign, it must be replaced and all code requirements must be followed.

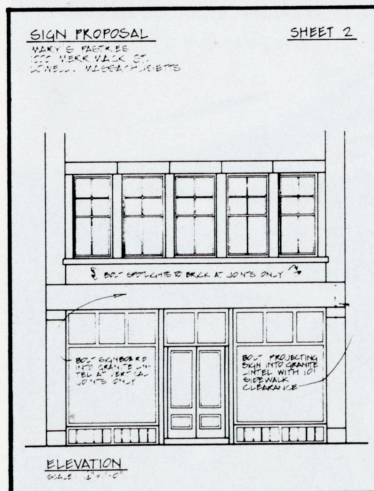
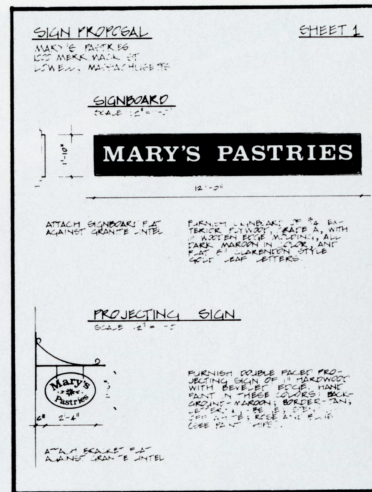


A typical late 19th century projecting sign and bracket.

Obtaining A Sign Permit

Your first step is to check with the Building Department at City Hall. There you can find out about fees and specific requirements for signs at your location.

If you have a good sketch of your proposed sign showing dimensions, colors, materials, and how it will be attached to the building, and provided that all code requirements are met, you may be able to obtain your permit on the spot.



A sign proposal package.

Special Permits

Certain types of signs (illuminated, projecting, painted wall, roof) require a special permit from the Board of Appeals. All new signs in the downtown business or B-3 zone must also be approved under the special permit process.

When a special permit is required you will need to prepare a sign proposal package for review by the Division of Planning and Development (DPD). This package should include:

- A drawing of the proposed sign showing dimensions, and describing materials, lettering (indicating if raised, flat or incised), colors, illumination, and support systems.
- A drawing of the building facade or site plan showing the location of the proposed sign.
- A cross-section of the building facade showing how the sign will be attached.

DPD staff will review your proposal and prepare a written recommendation for approval or denial to the Board of Appeals. You are welcome to consult with the staff during the review process. They can help make sure the proposed sign is appropriate to your building and will meet the code requirements.

The Board of Appeals will review your sign proposal when it is complete. You should plan to attend the meeting and public hearing at which your application is to be discussed. The Building Department will notify you of the meeting time and location.

Historic Districts

Lowell is nationally recognized as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. Many mills, houses and commercial buildings remain from the city's heyday as a prosperous manufacturing center. This has brought a great deal of attention to Lowell with the newly created State and National historic parks drawing visitors from throughout the country.

At this writing, the city boasts five National Register Districts, one National Historic Landmark District and an umbrella Historic Preservation District encompassing most of the structures associated with the 19th century industrial city. The Lowell Historic Preservation Commission (LHPC) is charged with protecting the buildings in this area which includes the National Park. While all these districts recognize important buildings and provide opportunities for certain federal tax incentives and other benefits, they do not directly affect the local building permit process.

Local historic districts are the only ones that require a review before any building alterations may take place. (The national districts require reviews before any federal funds are to be used in a project). There are currently two local districts; their boundaries and sign requirements are described in the materials inserted in this book.

In an effort to clarify and improve the approval process for historic buildings, a major revision of local ordinances is now in process. The update service described in the inserts will enable you to keep informed of any changes as they take place. In the interim, National and State Park and LHPC staff meet regularly with DPD to review sign proposals.

Exceptions to the Code

Should you desire to erect a sign that does not conform to the dimensional standards spelled out in the code, you can bring your case to the Board of Appeals for a variance. If you feel you need the variance to accommodate special architectural characteristics of your building, you should be prepared to show why.

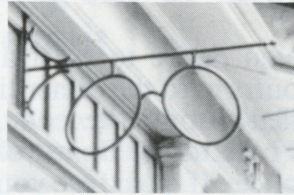


A sign permit may be obtained when all code requirements have been met.

SECTION TWO:

Design Guidelines

Location and Size



Sign location and size are important aspects of good sign design. When selecting a design, the most important thing to remember is that bigger is not necessarily better. Although a sign must be clearly visible, it should never dominate the building facade nor obscure its architectural details.

The first step in determining an appropriate size and location for a sign is to

study your storefront. Nineteenth century commercial buildings, which predominate in Lowell, were almost always designed with “sign space” as an integral part of the street front facade. Most often this sign space is the horizontal lintel which stretches across the top of a storefront within a commercial block. Sign lettering can either be painted or applied directly on the lintel or on sign boards which are attached to the lintel.



This historical sign fits the lintel of the building; it does not obscure any of the architectural features.



Lowell Suburban Directory, 1896-7

Late 19th century storefronts display a great variety of sign types.

A glance at historical photos will show that signage was not limited to the lintel area. Projecting signs, window signs, and signs on awnings are just a few of the possible locations for signage.

Regardless of the sign location you choose, it is important to keep the following design guidelines in mind:

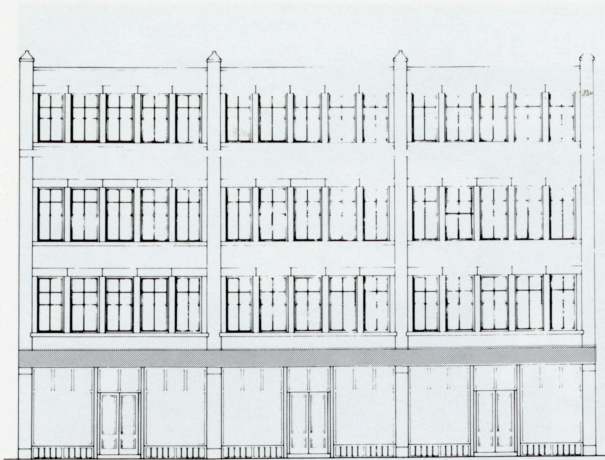
- Avoid overly large signs. Remember that unlike modern highway strip development, downtown Lowell's buildings and streets were built at a human scale, oriented to pedestrians, not cars. Consequently it is not necessary to depend on overly large signs to attract customers.

- Do not obscure or destroy architectural details. Stone arches, glass transom panels, and decorative brickwork are just a few of the features found on many of Lowell's downtown buildings which reflect a quality of workmanship difficult to duplicate today. This detailing greatly enhances our downtown character and atmosphere.



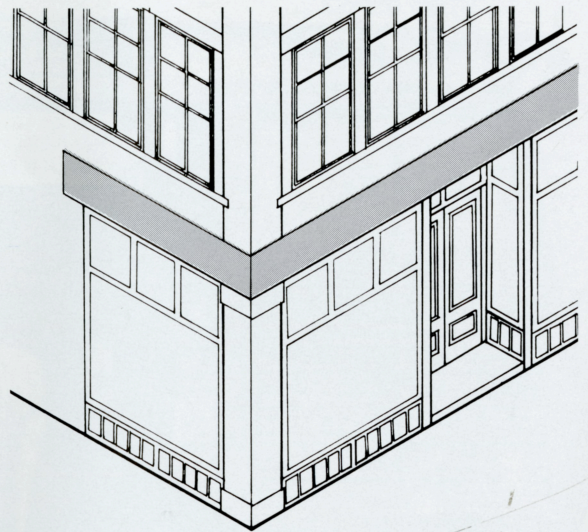
Most important is not to obscure the architectural details of your building.

- Coordinate the placement of signage on adjacent storefronts, especially those to be placed on the same building. Placing a sign higher or lower than adjacent signs may not increase readability but instead create visual confusion. However, if the adjoining signs are overscaled or badly positioned, the only solution is to do what is best for your storefront and wait for neighboring merchants to follow your example.



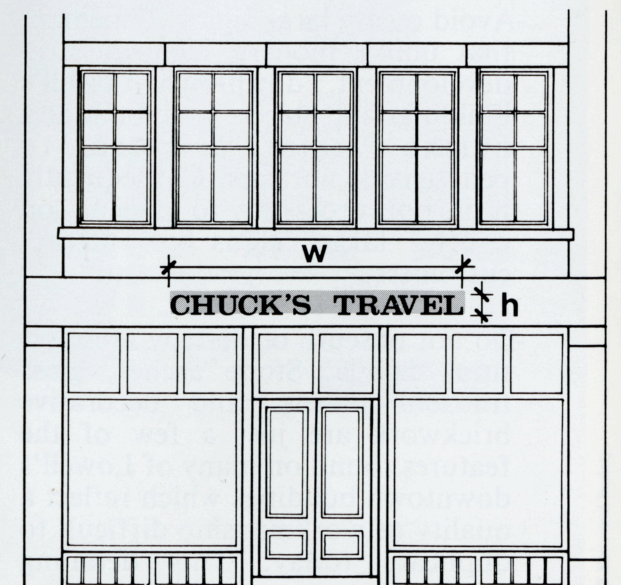
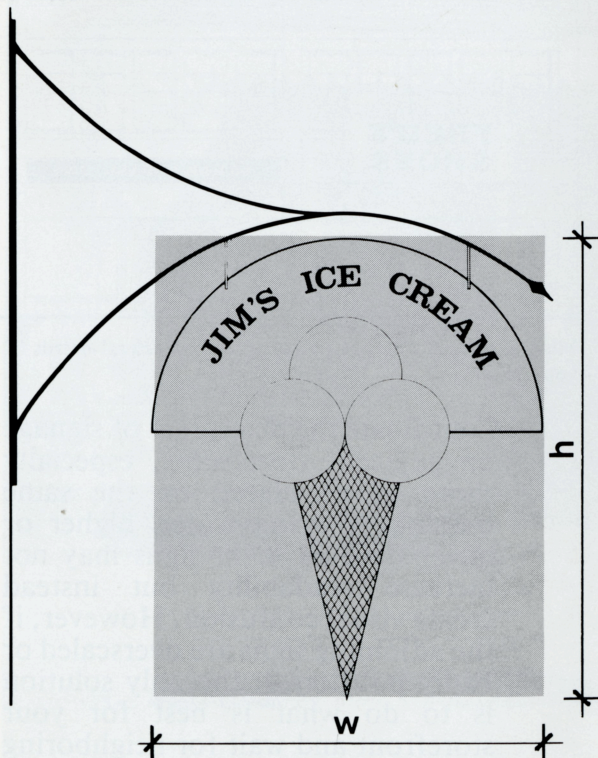
It is also necessary to adhere to the signage area restrictions of the sign code. Basically, the code allows two square feet of signage for each linear foot of building frontage.

Flat projecting signs may not be larger than sixteen square feet. Three dimensional object signs can have an area no greater than nine square feet at their largest cross section. For historic buildings downtown, these dimensions should be considered carefully, as far smaller signs will often be more in scale with the facade. Remember, too, that the



area of all signage is added together before the two square foot formula is applied. Thus a large projecting sign will reduce the amount of area left for other signs.

On corner buildings the signage area allowed on each street facade is calculated separately. The total allowed signage area may be split between several signs. The area of each sign is calculated as the largest rectangle or other geometric shape necessary to surround all lettering, wording, and accompanying designs and symbols, together with the background signboard.



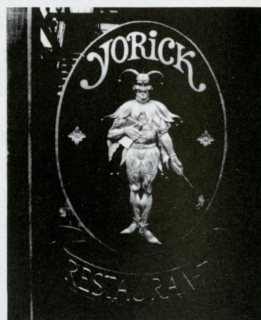
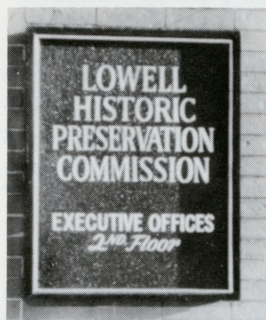
Sign area is calculated by multiplying the maximum width by the maximum height, (Area equals $w \times h$). If there is no signboard, enclose all letters and symbols in a rectangle and compute its area.

Messages and Lettering Styles

Messages

Signage constructed of compatible materials and in scale with the architecture of your building can increase the attractiveness of your storefront. The ultimate success of your signage scheme will depend, however, on whether or not people can tell at a short glance where your business is located and what products or services you sell. A well designed sign will display that information in a simple and legible form.

A sign should identify the name, function, and perhaps the address of a business. This information can be conveyed through a number of visual devices: words, pictures, names, symbols, and logos.

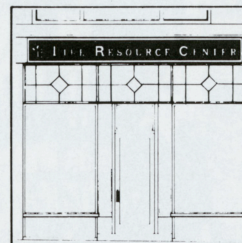


The most important point to remember when designing your sign's message is to keep it simple. Too many pieces of information will only clutter the sign and confuse the viewer. The best signs incorporate the fewest number of words possible and perhaps a picture or symbol to create a strong visual identity for your business which is easily understood in just a glance. Avoid listing every product sold. The code limits the space which may be occupied by trademarks to 10% of the sign area.

Before



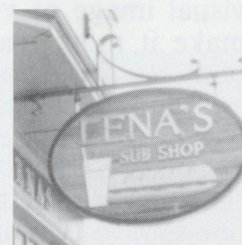
Proposed



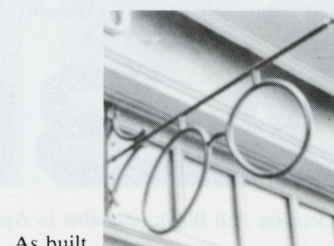
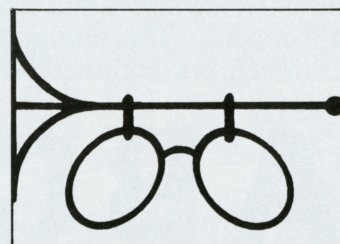
Before



After



Proposed



As built

Lettering: Styles



U. of Lowell

The curved lettering visible on this late 19th century sign was typical of the period.

Lettering is also an important factor in successful sign design. Well chosen, properly spaced lettering can enhance the visual image of your sign's message and make it more readable. In general, it is best to avoid overly ornate lettering, especially on lintel signs. Simple, relatively plain styles are easier to read and appear less cluttered. It is also best to limit the number of lettering styles used on any one sign to two or at the most three.

Historic photos and turn of the century sign painter's manuals offer some ideas on lettering styles and materials which are appropriate for signs on 19th and early 20th century commercial buildings. Signs

visible on the earliest photos of downtown Lowell show flush painted capital letters in simple, sans-serif styles. The examples of Egyptian Block Octagon and Octagon Full Block illustrated here are typical of early lettering styles.

Late 19th century painted signs used more graceful serif lettering styles. The Boston Straight Roman and Boston Round Full Block styles illustrated closely resemble lettering used in Lowell during that period. These and other historic type styles remain available today. A number of contemporary lettering styles are also available which can be compatible with historic buildings.

A B C D

Egyptian Block Octagon (alphabet in Appendix).

A B C D

Boston Straight Roman (Caslon is modern equivalent).

A B C D

Octagon Full Block (alphabet in Appendix).

A B C D

Boston Round Full Block (Clarendon is modern equivalent).

In addition to two-color schemes used on less expensive signs, painters used gold leaf and contrasting areas of shade and shadow to create the illusion of letters projecting from flat signboards. Lettering was often arranged in graceful curves and combined with painted borders and scrolled ornament to form delicately balanced but bold signs. Fancier stores at this time used raised wooden letters in similar serif styles. Painted or more often gold leafed, these letters were attached directly to the lintel area or a painted or smalted* signboard.

Rounded and serif letters, carved and painted, predominated in Lowell's signs until well into the early 20th century. Near the end of this period, a rather heavy raised and gold leafed script style of letters became quite popular and was used by many of Lowell's downtown stores. The script letters were attached to signboards painted in rich tones of red, blue, and green.

Lettering: Size

Once the message and lettering styles have been chosen it is necessary to decide on the size of letters. Signs in the downtown area should be oriented toward pedestrians and slow-moving automobile traffic. It is not necessary to have overly large letters to make your sign's message visible.

As a general rule, the maximum height of a capital letter should be three-fourths of the height of the sign background. For most lintel signs, eight to fifteen inch letters are sufficiently large and most appropriate. Careful spacing of letters and words is also important in determining the legibility of your sign. Leave adequate space between letters, words, and lines of lettering. To avoid a cluttered appearance, no more than 60% of the total sign area should be occupied by lettering.



A lintel sign with appropriate letter size and spacing.

*smalted: dark colored crushed glass

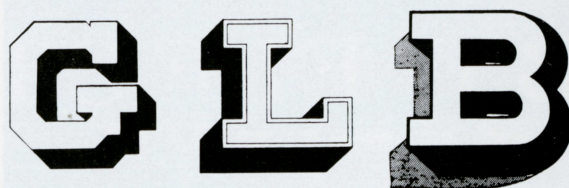
Color

Color selection is one of the most crucial aspects of successful sign design for it is the contrast in color between lettering and background which makes a sign easy to read. Because a sign should complement rather than clash with its surroundings, sign colors must also be compatible with the building facade and adjacent signs.

Generally speaking, no more than two or three colors (plus black, white or gold) should be used on any individual sign. Too many different colors or colors which are too similar in tone make a sign difficult to read. Dark backgrounds with light letters are often the most successful signs and have been the traditional practice in Lowell throughout the years. However, other color combinations can also be effective.

Historically, the earliest signs had black backgrounds with white or light colored painted letters. Later, gold leaf often replaced the painted lettering and in addition to black backgrounds store owners selected painted or smalted backgrounds in deep tones of loden green, royal blue, maroon and purple.

Early sign maker's manuals are filled with contrasting but simple color combinations for painted signs. Letters were often outlined and shaded to give them a three-dimensional appearance.

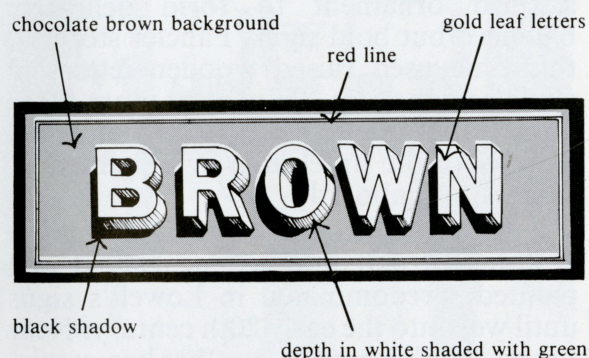


This technique gives depth to the lettering.

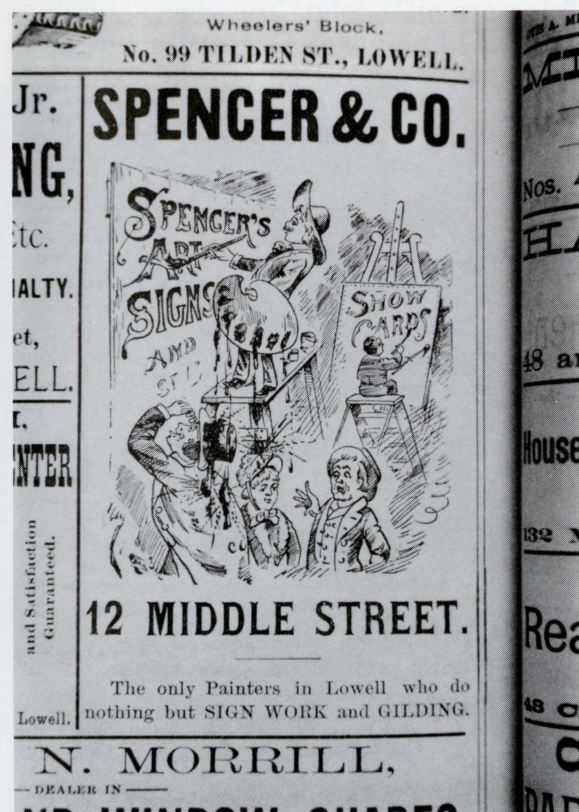
This is an example of an outlined letter with depth added.

This example shows an outlined letter with depth and shadow.

For painted lettering on windows, an historical color scheme which can still be very attractive includes gold leaf lettering, green or white outline and black depth or shadow.



Six different colors could be used to create this successful sign.



Early city directories displayed many advertisements for sign painters.

Projecting Signs

For other painted signs, whether wall or projecting or any other sign mentioned in this handbook, the following color combinations are recommended:

Paint or Smalts Background	Letters	Accent Colors
Black	Gold leaf, white, red, blue, green, cream, straw yellow	White, red, green, gold leaf, blue, dark yellow
Navy blue	White, red	Black, white, straw yellow, gold leaf
Gray	Navy blue, black	White, red
Emerald green	Gold leaf, white, red	White, gold leaf, black
Brown	Gold leaf, light blue	Red, white
Cream	Navy blue, red	Black
Red	Gold leaf, white, mustard yellow	Black
Mustard yellow	Navy blue, red	Red, black

Early sign maker's manuals are filled with distinctive color schemes for painted letter signs. The color combinations listed here were adapted from several of these books. See the Appendix of this book for detailed references. Most of the publications listed are available at the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission offices.

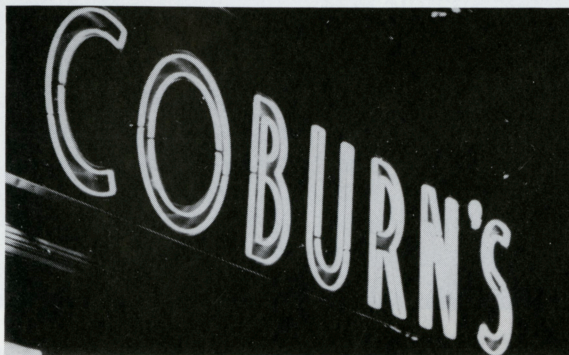
Illumination

Illuminated signs are permitted, with restrictions, under the sign code. External illumination must be provided by a continuous light source that is installed to prevent direct light from shining onto the street or adjacent properties. Flashing or moving lights are not permitted.

The light source you select may be incandescent or fluorescent but should emit white light. Spot, track, overhang, or wall lamps are all acceptable light sources. Avoid high intensity light sources, as they often produce excessive glare.

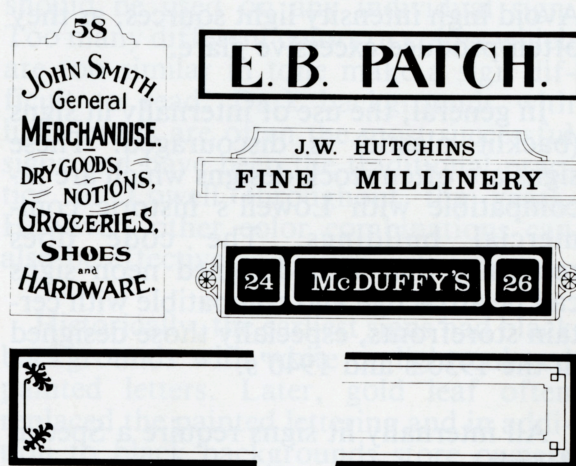
In general, the use of internally lit signs (backlit plastic) is discouraged. These signs are often stock designs which are incompatible with Lowell's historic commercial buildings. The code does recognize that well designed neon signs can be attractive and compatible with certain storefronts, especially those designed in the 1930's and 1940's.

All internally lit signs require a Special Permit.



Wall Signs

Historically, the most common sign type in Lowell was the lintel sign. Placed directly on or just above the storefront lintel, these early 19th century wall signs were typically narrow rectangles of painted or cloth-covered wood, surrounded with a plain molding. The signs included the name and street address of the firm painted in light block letters on a dark background.



Vertical and horizontal historical wall signs.

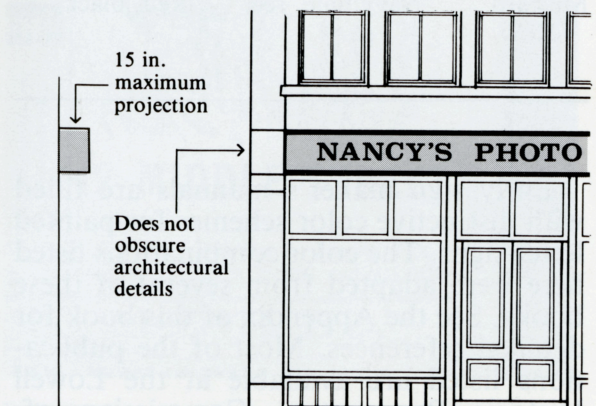
Later lintel signs were more ornate. In addition to wood, japanned* metal and back-painted glass were sometimes used. Sign colors became brighter and the backgrounds were often coated with colored and sand smalts for a rich, velvety effect. Often times a second, narrower sign board was attached on top of the first. The second sign was usually trimmed with carved end brackets or turned spindle work. Other signs retained the rectangular shape but were divided into smaller panels with half-round or rope moldings or with painted or gold leafed borders. Stenciled motifs were popular and were often found at the corners of signs. These stenciled decorations created the effect of curved or fancy cut edges on the corners or ends of rectangular signboards.

*japanned: glossy black varnish

Other wall signs were used on the ground floor level to advertise specific products sold within the stores or to identify businesses located on the upper floors. Not limited to lintels, these signs had a variety of shapes and sizes and were placed in several locations on the facade. They were often made of metal which was curved to fit around entrance piers. Late 19th century wall signs combined several sizes and styles of painted or gold leafed lettering, typically arranged in subtly balanced curves.

Regardless of the type of wall sign you choose, it will be necessary to adhere to the following requirements of the Sign Code unless a variance is obtained from the Board of Appeals:

- A wall sign cannot project more than 15 inches from the building surface.
- Signs can be no larger than 2 square feet for each foot of building face parallel to the street.
- The sign cannot obscure architectural details of the building (such as cornices, windows, arches, transoms) to which it is attached.
- A wall sign cannot extend above the lowest point of the roof, nor beyond the ends of the wall to which it is attached.



Projecting Signs and Brackets

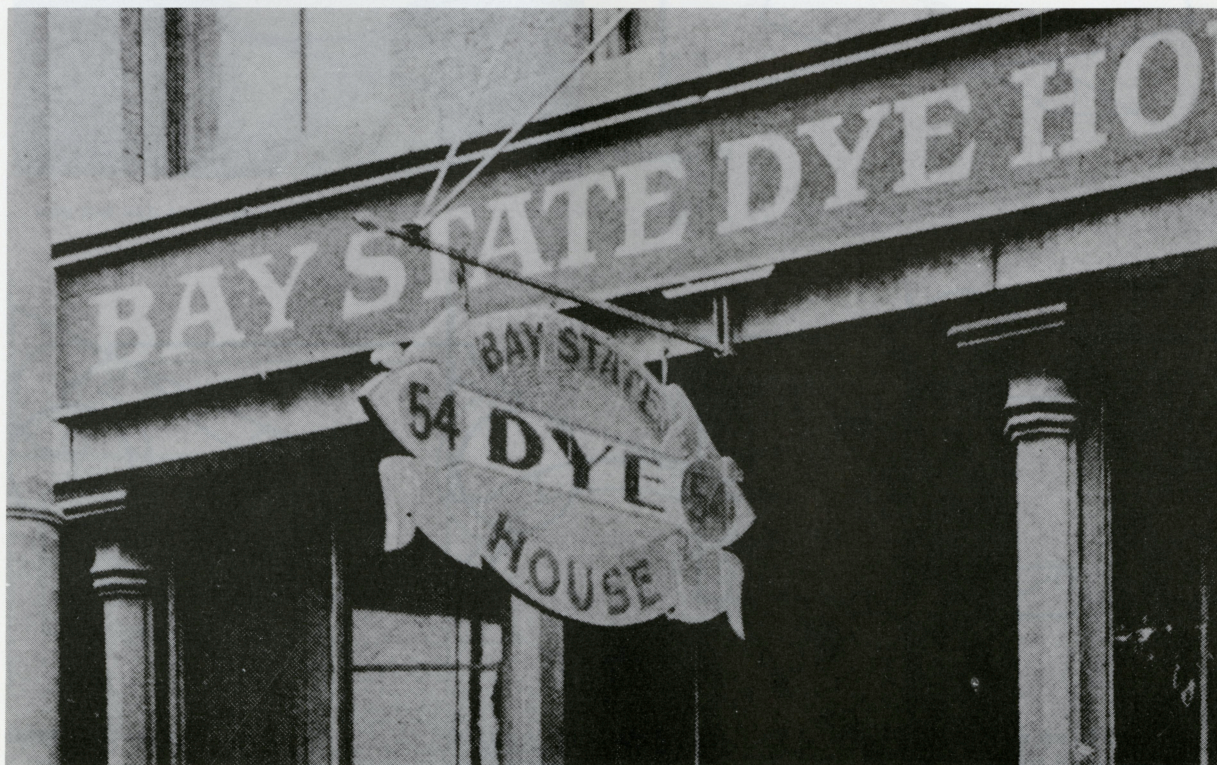
Hung perpendicular to the building face, projecting signs are highly visible and can be an extremely effective means of identifying your business. Because of their high visibility, however, projecting signs have perhaps the greatest potential to enhance or detract from the character of the downtown streetscape. Well-designed signs, scaled for pedestrians and symbolizing the services offered, can add color and bring customers to a business.



A very simple yet effective projecting sign.

The earliest projecting signs in Lowell used pictures and symbols to illustrate and readily identify the product or service which the business sold. These symbol signs were important to many of the city's first residents who did not read English. For example, hardware and cutlery were sold under the sign of the andiron, imported oils and liquors were sold at the sign of the whale. Nearly every druggist used a gold leafed mortar and pestle to advertise his cures and one Lowell dentist even hung a carved molar above his office door.

Later, projecting signs combined words and symbols on hanging wooden or metal signboards. Although some signs were rectangular, curved and oval shapes were especially popular during the late 19th century. Because these signs were hung closer to eye level, more decorative styles of lettering could be used. The lines of lettering were often curved to harmonize with the signboard's shape.



The Lowell Magazine

A very common historical projecting sign: an oval shape with ribbon-shaped edges and a very simple bracket

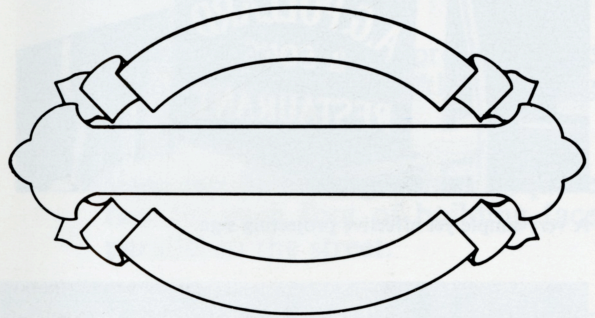
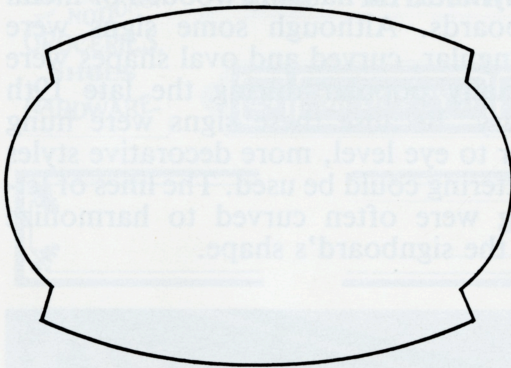
If you are considering a projecting sign, it is important to keep the following points in mind:

-If you have an early commercial building (pre-1850), consider using a 3-D symbol. It is not necessary to use an historical one; why not develop an imaginative contemporary representation of your business activity?

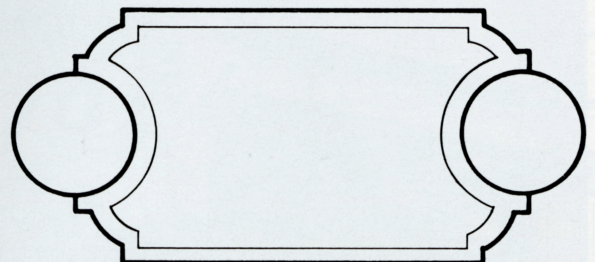
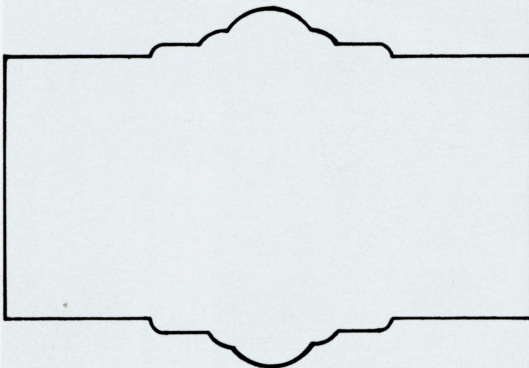
-If you have a late 19th or early 20th century building, stick to geometric shapes with flat or carved symbols

and flat or raised lettering. Avoid colonial "tavern sign" shapes with stained wood and carved lettering as they are inappropriate on later (after 1850) buildings.

-Avoid placing too many projecting signs on one building. For maximum visibility, sign experts recommend a minimum of 50 feet between projecting signs. It is better to have a few outstanding projecting signs on each block to draw customer attention rather than a cluster of signs which compete against each other.



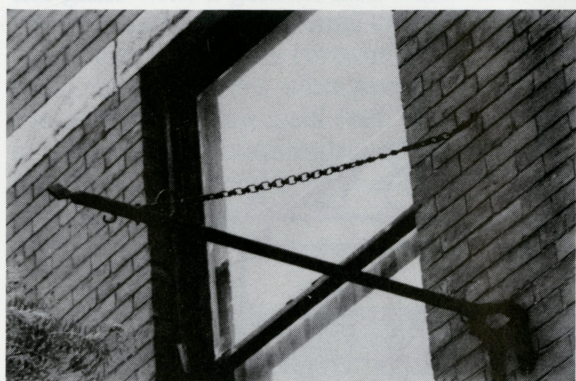
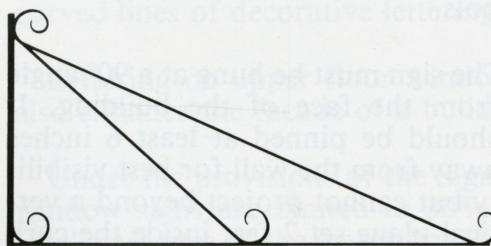
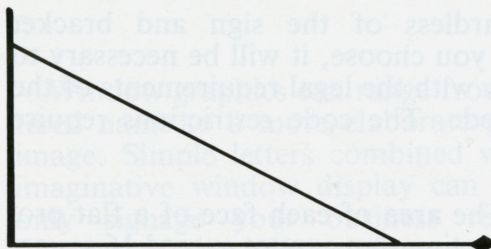
Variations of oval shapes



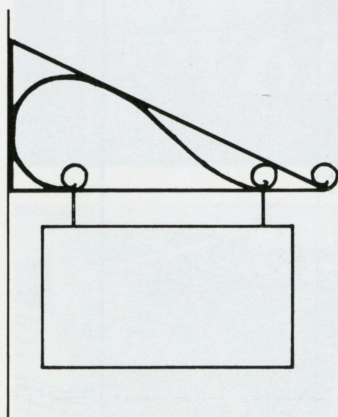
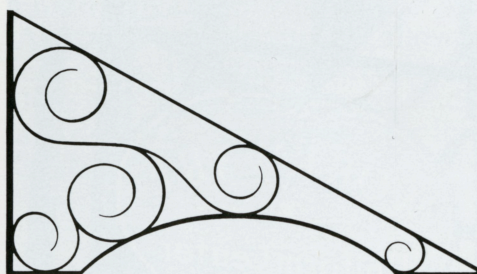
Variations of rectangular shapes

It is also important to consider the design of the bracket supporting your projecting sign. Historically, projecting brackets in Lowell were extremely plain. A most common type consisted of a piece of iron rod with a pointed finial, supported by two pieces of chain or rod in tripod fashion. More decorative brackets may be used but they should complement, not overwhelm, their signs. Avoid an abundance of decorative wrought iron curves; the lines of the brackets should harmonize with the shape of the sign. The most important feature of a bracket should be its ability to hold up the sign.

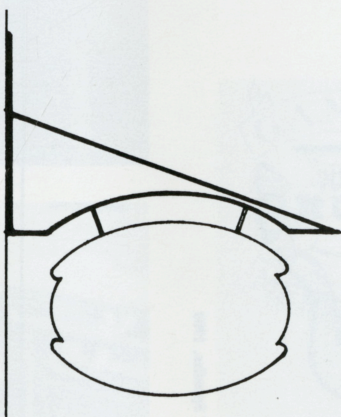
To avoid damaging brick and stonework, brackets should be designed so that they can be bolted into masonry joints when possible. Examples of sign brackets from early sign making manuals are shown in the illustrations.



....iron rod with a pointed finial....



Bracket and rectangular sign



Bracket which closely follows sign's oval shape



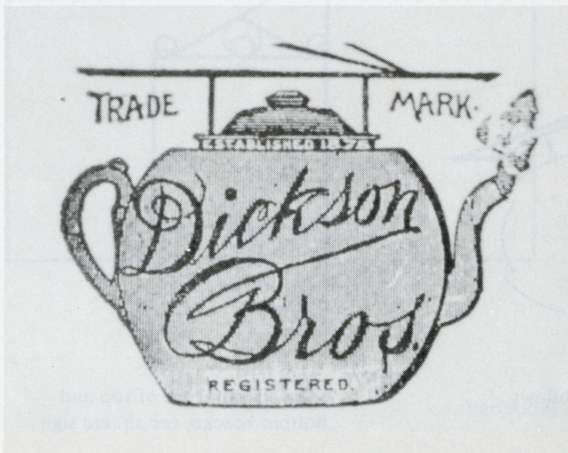
Very effective use of top and bottom bracket for square sign

Regardless of the sign and bracket design you choose, it will be necessary to comply with the legal requirements of the sign code. The code restrictions require that:

- The area of each face of a flat projecting sign cannot exceed 16 square feet. The area will be calculated as the smallest rectangle or other geometric shape that will enclose the signboard and any attached symbols.
- The sign must be hung at a 90° angle from the face of the building. It should be pinned at least 6 inches away from the wall for best visibility but cannot project beyond a vertical plane set 2 feet inside the curb line.

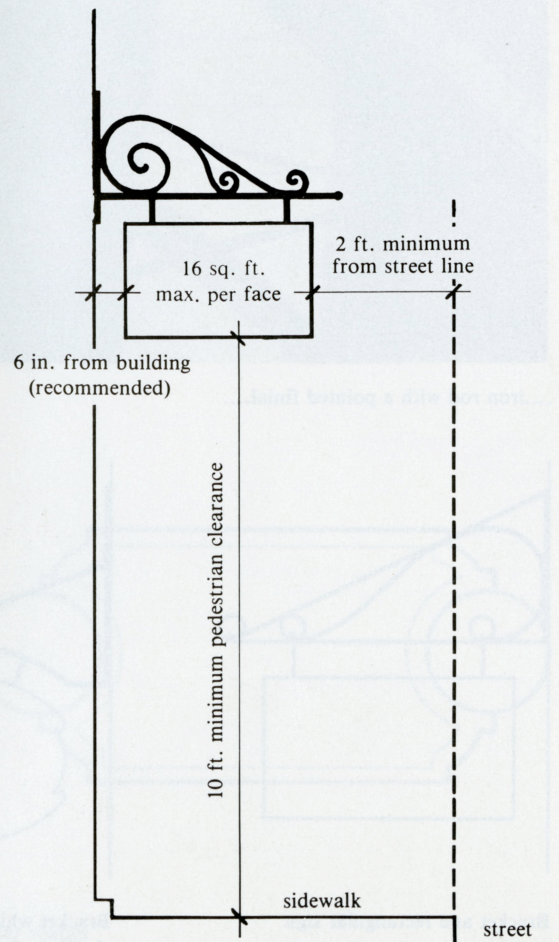


A contemporary projecting sign



A representation of an early projecting symbol sign

- On a multi-storied building, the sign should be suspended between the bottom of the second story window sills and the top of the doors or windows of the first story. On a one-story building, the top of the sign should be suspended in line with the lowest point of the roof.
- The bottom of the sign should maintain at least a ten foot pedestrian clearance from the sidewalk level.
- All signs which project over a public right of way require a license from the City Council.
- Three dimensional object signs cannot exceed 9 square feet at their largest cross section.

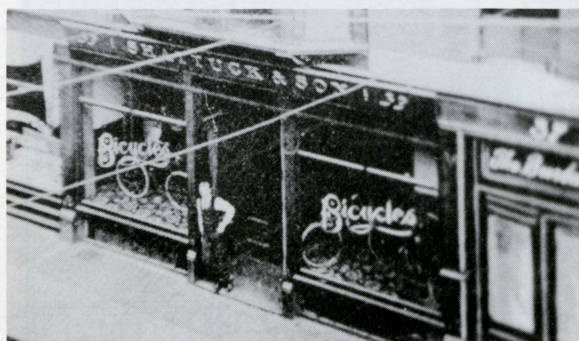


Display Window Signs

When considering types of signs, don't forget your windows. Window graphics were important in the past and can be used today as an attractive feature which reinforces your business identity. Window signs are particularly effective when awnings block the lintel sign from view.

Window signs can be opaque, translucent, or transparent signboards hung from the window frame. Lettering and designs can also be applied directly to the glass. Applied lettering is usually preferred because it does not significantly block the view into or out of the storefront. Lettering can either be painted, etched, or for a richer effect, gold leafed.

Gold leaf work is done with extremely thin sheets of gold which are applied to the glass with a gelatin and water size and backed up with paint and varnish for permanence. (Lowell is fortunate to still have local sign painters who are proficient in the art of making gold leaf window signs at surprisingly reasonable cost.) By varying the type of gold used and the ground to which it is applied, they are able to produce a wide variety of colors and textures.



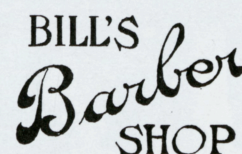
Modern and historical window lettering.

Window graphics can range from a lettered name to a more elaborate graphic image. Simple letters combined with an imaginative window display can be the only signage your business requires. Because of the relative closeness of the sign to the viewer, more ornate free flowing lettering styles may be worth the effort. Late 19th century shop windows in Lowell were often enhanced by gracefully curved lines of decorative lettering.

Lettering on upper floor windows can also enhance the facade of a building.

Under the provisions of the Sign Code, window signs are limited to 30% of the total glass area of the storefront and must be included in the total sign area allowed.

Many shop owners use temporary, hand-lettered window signs which are unattractive and clutter the storefront. Although these signs are allowed by the sign code, they may not cover more than 30% of the window area and are not allowed to remain in place for longer than 30 days.



Designs for early window signs

Awning Signs

Historically appropriate on most commercial buildings in Lowell, operable awnings serve both functional and decorative needs. They were common in early Lowell where shop windows faced the sun. Awnings are primarily intended to protect shoppers and window displays from intense sunlight but can also give protection from inclement weather. A distinctive color or your business name or logo on the awning valance can further enhance your storefront.

To select an awning design which is appropriate to the architecture of your building it is important to consider color and material selection, as well as adhere to the legal requirements of the code. Canvas is the best awning material. Available in a wide variety of colors and striped patterns, it is a very durable fabric. Glossy or leatherette finished vinyls and fixed in place aluminum or rigid plastic awnings are not compatible with historic storefronts and should be avoided. Select an awning color or striped pattern which complements your

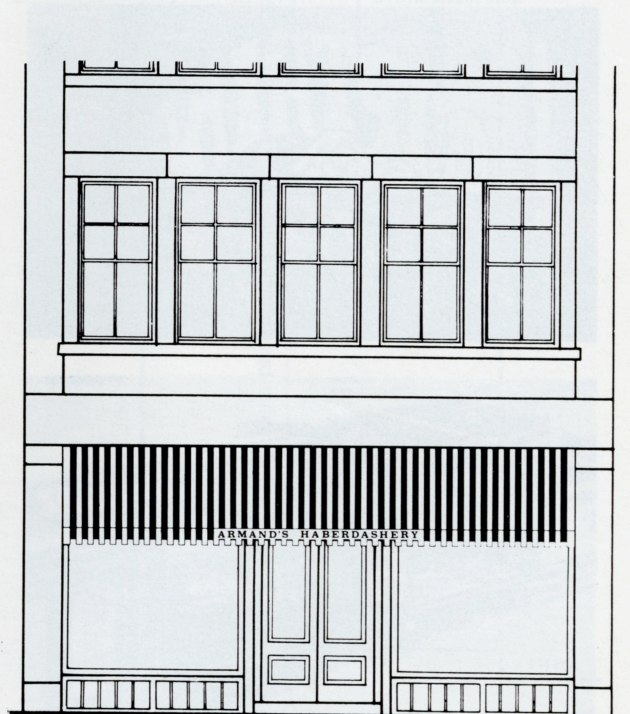
building's facade. Historically, striped awnings combining two or three colors were most popular in downtown Lowell. Awnings should also be coordinated for color, pattern and height with other nearby awnings.

Historic photos show the valance area was often decorated with the name and street number of the business in tasteful lettering. This type of sign can be very distinctive. However, it is still necessary to comply with the requirements of the code which state that:

- Awning signs be painted or attached flat against the surface of the awning. They cannot extend beyond the ends of the awning or be attached to its underside.
- Letters or numbers included in the awning sign cannot exceed ten inches in height and the bottom edge of the awning must maintain a minimum clearance of seven feet above sidewalk level.



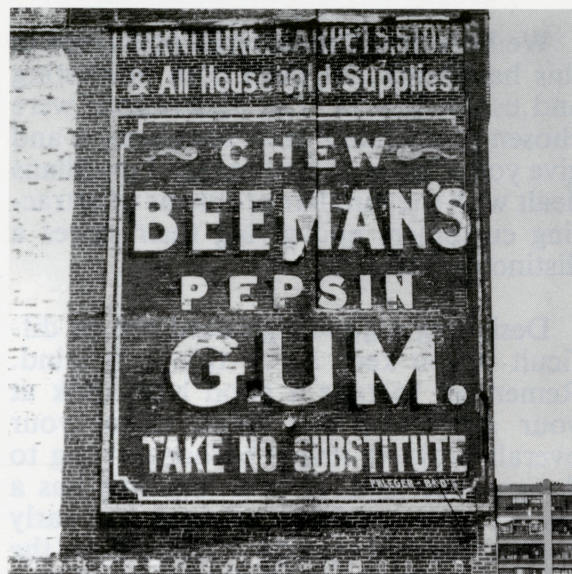
Historical awning designs are still appropriate today.



Painted Wall Signs

Another common late 19th century sign type was the painted wall sign. A number of these still exist on commercial and mill buildings in Lowell and have an attractive graphic quality seldom matched by modern billboards. Should your building have such a sign, you may want to consider preserving it by applying a clear sealer or even restoring its original colors.

New painted wall signs may also be applied to buildings in the city with the award of a special permit.



Painted wall sign displaying a very typical historical block styled letter, with outline and shadow, should be preserved.



U. of Lowell

Merrimack and Palmer Streets, circa 1892

Although the painted wall sign is large, it is well scaled to the blank brick wall and is at pedestrian level.

For More Help

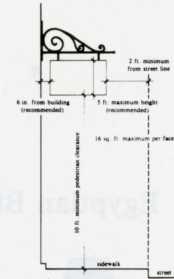
We hope that the material contained in this handbook has been both interesting and useful to you. The illustrations were chosen to stimulate your imagination and give you a sense of how earlier Lowellians dealt with the familiar problems of attracting customers and giving their stores a distinctive look.

Designing a good sign need not be difficult if you keep a few things in mind. Remember to take a good hard look at your storefront and think about your overall business image before starting to design your sign. If your building has a history, try to find out how its early owners handled signage -- chances are the original architect or builder set aside a space for this purpose. Familiarize yourself with the basic permit procedures and guidelines for your part of the city. And above all, don't be afraid to ask for help from the groups listed here, all of whom would be more than happy to give you a hand with research, design or steering you to the right person to answer your questions.

Division of Planning and Development
J.F.K. Civic Center
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852
454-8821 - Extension 404
Contact Person: Tina Spector

Lowell Historic Preservation Commission
204 Middle Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852
458-7653
Contact Person: Pam Chicklis

Division of Technical and Professional Services
Lowell National Historical Park
171 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852
459-1033
Contact Person: Colette Joyce



U. of Lowell

Merrimack and Shattuck Streets, circa 1893

Egyptian Block Octagon:

A B C D E F G H I
J K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z

Octagon Full Block:

A B C D E F
G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z

Early Sign Painter's Manuals

1. Boyce, A.P. **The Art of Lettering and Sign Painter's Manual**. Boston: 1878.
2. Hasluck, Paul N., ed. **Glass Writing Embossing and Fascia Work**. Philadelphia: David McKay, 1914.
3. Idarius, Peter. **The Standard American Drawing and Lettering Book**. Chicago: Land and Lee, Publishers, 1912.
4. International Textbook Company. **Sign and Banner Making- Practical Design and Ornament**. Scranton: International Textbook Company, 1906.
5. Koller, E.L. **Sign Designing- Color in Signs**. Scranton: International Textbook Company, 1935.
6. Matthews, E.C. **How to Paint Signs and Sho Cards**. New York: J.S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, 1920.
7. **Ticket Writing and Sign Painting**. London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1916.

Contemporary Sign Design Guidelines

1. **The Boston Sign Code**. Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston, Massachusetts.
2. **The Building Book**. City of Lowell (Massachusetts) Division of Planning and Development, November, 1978.
3. Ewald, William R., Jr. **Street Graphics**. Washington: The American Society of Landscape Architects Foundation, 1971.
4. **Guide to Environmental Design Review for Commercial Facade Revitalization**. Town of Brookline (Massachusetts) Planning Department, 1977.
5. Mintz, Norman. "A Practical Guide to Storefront Rehabilitation," **Technical Leaflet No. 2**. Preservation League of New York, 1977.
6. **Signs: A guide for Retail Stores in Quincy**. Quincy (Massachusetts) Department of Planning and Community Development, 1976.
7. **Signs in Brookline**. Town of Brookline (Massachusetts) Planning Department, June, 1974.
8. **Surroundings: Ithaca, New York**. City of Ithaca (New York) Department of Planning and Development, March, 1978.

Excerpts From The Sign Code

ARTICLE I - IN GENERAL

SECTION 31-0 TITLE "LOWELL ZONING CODE":

This Ordinance, ordained in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 40A of Mass. General Laws shall be known as the "Lowell Zoning Code".

SECTION 31-1 DEFINITIONS:

For the purpose of this chapter, certain words and terms are hereby defined. The definitions set forth in the State Building Code of the City are also applicable, where appropriate, with respect to words and terms not defined herein. Words used in the present tense include the future; the singular number includes the plural; and the plural the singular; the word "lot" includes "plot"; the word "building" includes "structure"; the word "occupied" includes the words "designed, arranged or intended to be occupied". Where the verb "use" is employed, it shall be construed as if followed by the words, "or is intended, arranged, designed, built, altered, converted, rented or leased to be used"; the word "shall" is mandatory and not directory. However, all definitions must be in conformity with Chapter 808 of the Acts of 1975 and 40A M.G.L.A., as amended.

Accessory Building - A bldg. devoted exclusively to a use subordinate to the principal use and, customarily, incidental to the principal use of the lot.

Accessory Sign - a sign which is subordinate to the principle use and customarily incidental to, and on the same lot as, the principle use.

Accessory Use - A use subordinate to the principal use, and customarily incidental to, and on the same lot as the principal use.

Banner - A temporary or permanent sign made of a fabric or fabric like material which may be free hanging or attached at all corners.

Building Code - Building Code herein shall refer to the Massachusetts State Building Code.

Cornice - the exterior trim of a structure at the meeting of a roof and a wall.

Dwelling, Multi-Family - A building arranged, intended or designed to contain three or more dwelling units.

Dwelling, One-Family, Detached - A dwelling with no party wall or walls arranged, intended or designed as the home or residence of one family.

Dwelling, One-Family, Semi-Detached - A dwelling with a single party wall, arranged, intended or designed as the home or residence of one family.

Dwelling, Two-Family - A dwelling arranged, intended or designed as home or residence of two families, each family occupying a single dwelling unit normally situated one above the other.

Dwelling Unit - A room or group of rooms forming a habitable unit for one family, used or intended to be used for living, sleeping, cooking and eating.

Facade - the exterior face of a building which is treated in a architectural fashion.

Flashing Sign - an illuminated sign in which the artificial light is not maintained in a stationary or constant intensity.

Floor Area, Gross

(a) The sum, in square feet, of the gross horizontal areas of all the floors of a building, as measured from the exterior faces of the exterior walls or center lines of walls separating two buildings, including:

- 1) Roofed porches and balconies, whether enclosed or unenclosed, and unroofed porches and balconies, whether enclosed or unenclosed, and unroofed porches and balconies above the second floor.
- 2) Elevator shafts and stairwells on each floor.
- 3) Attic space, whether finished or unfinished, except as hereafter excluded.
- 4) Interior balconies, mezzanines and penthouses.
- 5) Basement and cellar areas not devoted exclusively to uses accessory to the operation of the building.

(b) The following areas are excluded from the gross areas:

- 1) Areas used for parking garages, accessory parking or off-street loading purposes.
- 2) Basement and cellar areas devoted exclusively to uses accessory to the operation of the building.
- 3) Open or lattice-enclosed exterior fire escapes, and unroofed porches and balconies and no higher than the second floor.
- 4) Attic space and other areas for elevator machinery or mechanical equipment accessory to the building.

Floor Area Ratio - The ratio of gross floor area of a structure to the total area of the lot.

Frontage - An uninterrupted distance measured between lot lines along a single way or along two intersecting ways of the angled intersection, the two ways are greater than one hundred twenty degrees.

Home Occupation

(a) An activity customarily carried on by the permanent residents of a dwelling unit, inside the dwelling unit, requiring only customary home or hobby type equipment, and not involving:

- 1) The sale of articles produced elsewhere than on the premises for the purpose of sale.
- 2) The storage of materials or products outside of a principal building.
- 3) The making of external structural alterations which are not customary in residential buildings.
- 4) The production of offensive noise, vibration, smoke, dust, or other particulate matter, heat, humidity, glare or other objectionable effects.

(b) Home occupations include but are not limited to:

- 1) Fine arts studios.
- 2) Dressmaking.
- 3) Teaching of not more than four pupils simultaneously or, in the case of musical instruction, of not more than a single pupil at a time.

(c) Home occupations do not include such uses as:

- 1) Barbershops, beauty parlors.
- 2) Funeral parlors.
- 3) Commercial stables or kennels.
- 4) Real estate or insurance offices.
- 5) Recognized professions.

Lintel - is the horizontal support member across the head of a door or window.

Lot Area - The horizontal area of the lot exclusive of any area in a public or private way open to public uses.

Lot Area (I.P.H.R. District) See Section 31-35 (b)

Nonconforming Structure - Any structure which does not conform to the dimensional requirements in this chapter or to the parking and loading requirements of this chapter for the district in which it is located; provided, that such structure was in existence and lawful at the time the applicable provisions of this or prior zoning ordinances became effective.

Nonconforming Use - A use of a building, structure or lot that does not conform to the use regulations of this chapter for the district in which it is located; provided, that such use was in existence and lawful at the time the applicable provisions of this or prior zoning ordinances became effective.

Open Space, Landscaped - The parts of a lot designed and developed for pleasant appearance in trees, shrubs, ground covers and grass, including other landscaped elements such as natural features of the site, walks and terraces, and also including open areas accessible to and developed for the use of the occupants of the buildings and located upon a roof not more than ten feet above the ceiling level of the highest story used for dwelling purposes. Such space may not include lot area used for parking, access drives or other hard-surfaced areas, except walks, and terraces as noted above, designed and intended for nonvehicular use. Such hard-surfaced walks and terraces may not exceed fifty percent of the total required landscaped open space.

Open Space, Useable - The parts of a lot designed and developed for outdoor use by the occupants of the lot for recreation, including swimming pools, tennis courts or similar facilities, for gardens or for household service activities such as clothes drying, which space is at least seventy-five percent open to the sky, free of automotive traffic and parking and readily accessible by all those for whom it is required. Such space may include open area accessible to and developed for the use of the occupants of

the buildings, and located upon a roof not more than ten feet above the level of the highest story used for dwelling purposes. Open space shall be deemed usable only if at least seventy-five percent of the area has a grade of less than eight percent.

Parking Garage or Parking Area, Nonresidential - A building, structure, lot or part of a lot designed or used for the shelter or storage of commercial or noncommercial motor vehicles used by the occupants or users of a lot or lots devoted to use or uses not permitted in a residence district, in which space is available either to long-term or to transient or casual parkers.

Parking Garage or Parking Area, Residential - A building, structure, part of a building or structure, lot or part of a lot designed or used for the shelter or storage of noncommercial motor vehicles used by the occupants or users of a lot or lots devoted to a use or uses permitted in a residence district and in which no space is rented for casual or transient parkers.

Permanent Sign - a sign intended to be used for a period greater than thirty (30) days.

Planned Unit Development - A mixed use development on a plot of land containing a minimum of the lesser of sixty-thousand square feet or (5) five times the minimum lot size of the zoning district or as otherwise indicated in this Code, in which a mixture of residential, open space, commercial, industrial or other uses and a variety of building types to be allowed by Special Permit as provided for in this Code.

Recognized Profession - Architecture, engineering, law, medicine, dentistry or other activity in which specialized services to clients are performed by persons possessing a degree from a recognized institution of higher learning demonstrating successful completion of a prolonged course of specialized intellectual instruction and study, and possessing evidence of professional capability such as membership in a professional society requiring standards of qualification for admission or licensing by the Commonwealth.

Sign - a structure which consists of a device, light, letter, word, model, banner, pennant, trade flag, logo, insignia, or representation which advertises, directs, or announces a use conducted, goods, products, services, or facilities available which influence persons, or conveys information, including electric signs, but excluding window displays or merchandise and signs which are incidental to the displayed merchandise.

Sign, Area of

(a) For a sign, either free-standing or attached, the area shall be considered to include all lettering, wording and accompanying designs and symbols, together with the background, whether open or enclosed, on which they are displayed, but not including any supporting framework and bracing which are incidental to the display itself.

(b) For a sign painted upon or applied to a building, the area shall be considered to include all lettering, wording and accompanying designs or symbols together with any background of a different color than the natural color of the building.

SECTION 31-22 SIGNS:

(c) For a sign consisting of individual letters or symbols attached to or painted on a surface, building, wall or window, the area shall be considered to be that of the smallest rectangle or other shape which encompasses all the letters and symbols.

Sign, On Premises - Sign or other advertising device which advertises or indicates only the person occupying the premises on which it is located, the merchandise for sale or the activity conducted thereon.

Sign - the horizontal exterior member below a window.

Special Permit Granting Authority - is the Board of Appeals of the City of Lowell as defined in Section 31-26 of the Lowell Zoning Code.

State Building Code (S.B.C.) - S.B.C. shall refer to the Massachusetts State Building Code and include Building Code.

Street - The right of way, including sidewalks, of a public way, or private way open to public use, used or intended for use by automobile traffic, including highways, parkways, alleys, courts and squares used or intended for this purpose, to which owners of abutting land have a right of access.

Temporary Sign - a sign intended to be used for a period of 30 days or less.

Trailer - A highway vehicle designed, constructed and equipped for use as a dwelling and which is capable of being hauled or towed, or is self-propelled, including any such vehicle so converted as would make it immobile.

Use - The purpose for which land or a building is arranged, designed or intended, or for which either land or a building is or may be occupied or maintained.

Yard, Front - The yard extending across the full width of the lot and lying between the front street line, or the building line and the nearest part of a building.

Yard, Rear - The yard extending across the full width of the lot and lying between the rear line of the lot and the nearest part of a building.

Yard Side - The yard between the side line of the lot and the nearest part of a building and extending from the front yard to the rear yard, or in the absence of either such yards, to the front or rear lot line, as may be.

No signs or advertising devices of any kind or nature shall be erected on any premises or affixed to the outside of any structure except as specifically permitted in the following:

A. SIGN TYPES

1. Address Sign - one sign displaying the street number or name of the occupant of the premises, or both.
 - a. Such sign may include identification of an accessory professional office or customary home occupation (as defined in Section 31-1 of Lowell City Code).
 - b. Such sign may be attached to the building or may be on a rod or post not more than four (4) feet high, and at least three (3) feet in from street line.
 - c. Such sign may not exceed two (2) square feet in area.
 - d. Sign must be stationary and not contain any motorized moving parts.
2. Awning Sign - a sign painted on or attached to a moveable metallic frame, of the hinged roll or folding type, which may have a covering either combustible or incombustible.
 - a. Such sign must be painted on or attached flat against the surface of, but not extending beyond or attached to the underside.
 - b. Letters shall not exceed ten (10) inches in height.

- c. A minimum clearance above sidewalk level of seven (7) feet must be allowed for pedestrian clearance.
3. Billboard - Is an off-premise sign controlled by the Outdoor Advertising Board, which is used for the display of printed or painted advertising matter.
No off-premises billboard, sign or advertising device shall be erected or maintained unless the height, setback and illumination requirements set forth herein are met and unless a permit therefore has been granted by the Outdoor Advertising Authority in accordance with Section 29 through 33 of Chapter 92 of the General Laws, as from time to time amended, and such permit is valid and outstanding.
4. Community Directory Sign - an accessory bulletin or announcement board describing the location of event of a community service organization, institution, or public facility.
 - a. Such sign shall not exceed twenty (20) square feet in total area.
 - b. One such sign for each property is allowed, unless the street frontage of said institution exceeds one hundred (100) feet, then one sign for each hundred (100) feet is allowed but in no event more than three (3) such signs.
 - c. No such sign may be located nearer to a street line than one-half the depth of the required front yard.
5. Contractor Sign - is an off premise sign identifying the contractor's name, address, and other pertinent information.
 - a. Such sign may not exceed twenty (20) square feet.
 - b. Such sign may be maintained on the building or structure only for the interim of construction and not exceeding fifteen (15) days following the completion of said construction.
 - c. Failure to remove said sign within time period stated shall be removed by the Inspector of Buildings at the expense of the owner.
6. "For Sale" or "For Rent" Signs - an on-premise sign advertising the property being sold or rented.
 - a. Such signs shall not exceed six (6) square feet.
 - b. Such signs shall advertise only the property on which the sign is located.
- c. A maximum of two (2) such signs may be maintained on the property being sold or rented.
7. Free Standing Sign - is a self-supporting sign in a fixed location and not attached to any building or structure.
 - a. Such sign shall have no more than two (2) faces.
 - b. The area of each face shall not exceed thirty (30) square feet unless there are three (3) or more uses on the lot, then the area of each face shall not exceed seventy (50) square feet.
 - c. The top of such sign may not exceed a height of twenty (20) feet above grade.
 - d. A lot with a frontage of three hundred (300) feet or more may have two (2) such signs.
 - e. Such signs shall be erected so as to not obstruct free egress to or from any building or public right-of-way.
 - f. Such signs shall be constructed entirely of non-combustible materials.
 - g. There must be no exposed connecting wires.
8. Illuminated Sign - a sign that is artificially illuminated by means of electricity, gas, oil, or fluorescent paint.
 - a. Permits must be obtained for the erection of illuminated signs within the limitations set forth in this article for the location, size and type of sign or outdoor display.
 - b. All electrically illuminated signs shall conform to the requirements of the Massachusetts State Electrical Code.
 - c. All illumination must be a continuous external light, that is indirect and installed in a manner which will prevent direct light from shining onto any street or adjacent property. (SPOT, TRACK, OVER-HANG, OR WALL LAMPS ARE ACCEPTABLE).
 - d. Internally illuminated signs will require a Special Permit by the Special Permit Granting Authority.
 - e. No forms of illumination that is flashing, moving, animated or intermittent shall be allowed.
 - f. There must be no exposed connecting wires.

9. Individual Letters or Symbols - which are attached to an awning, marquee, a roof, building surface, wall, or signboard.
 - a. The area to be computed is that of the smallest rectangle or other geometric shape which encompasses all of the letters or symbols.
 - b. These letters or symbols shall not project more than twelve (12) inches from the building surface.
 - c. Letters and symbols shall not obscure architectural features of the building (including but not limited to cornices, lintels, transoms) to which the letters and symbols are attached.
 - d. Such letters and symbols shall not extend above the lowest part of the roof, nor beyond the ends of the wall to which they are attached.
 - e. Sign Size -
 1. Letters or symbols shall have an aggregate area not exceeding two square feet for each foot of building face parallel or substantially parallel to a street lot line. Where a lot fronts on more than one street, the aggregate sign area facing each street frontage shall be calculated separately.
 2. Signs shall not be permitted on building walls not parallel or within 45 degrees of parallel to the street, except directional signs such as for entrances or parking each not exceeding three square feet in area.
10. Marquee Signs - a sign painted on, attached to, or consisting of an interchangeable copy reader, on a permanent overhanging shelter which projects from the face of a building.
 - a. Such sign may be painted on or attached flat against the surface of, but not extending beyond or attached to the underside.
 - b. Letters or symbols shall not exceed sixteen (16) inches in height.
 - c. A minimum clearance above sidewalk level of ten (10) feet must be allowed for pedestrian clearance.
11. Painted Wall Signs - a permanent mural or message painted directly onto a building surface.
 - a. A special permit is required from the Special Permit Granting Authority.
12. Political Signs - a sign designed to influence the action of voters for:
 1. the passage or defeat of a measure; or
 2. the election of a candidate for nomination or election to public office at a national, state, or other local election.

A political sign is permitted as provided in Table of Allowed Sign Uses. The regulations in this section apply to outdoor political signs only.

 - a. Such signs are permitted in any land use district if it is stationary, unlighted, temporary, and is not:
 1. Erected earlier than fifteen (15) days before a primary and if a Candidate is defeated after nomination he must remove his signs in five (5) days and all other political signs to be removed five (5) days after the election.
 2. Attached to a utility pole, fence, tree or other vegetation, or upon a public right-of-way.
 3. Located closer than five hundred (500) feet from a free-way right-of-way.
 4. So situated that the face of it can be seen from a free-way right-of-way.
 5. Erected in such a manner that it will or reasonably may be expected to interfere with, obstruct, confuse, or mislead traffic.
 6. Attached to any structure (except that such sign may be displayed in a window).
 - b. Such sign may not exceed four (4) square feet in area.
 - c. A maximum of two (2) signs per lot is allowed.
 - d. Shall conform to Political Sign and Poster Regulations stated in Section 3-6 of the Lowell City Code.
13. Projecting Signs - a permanent sign that is hung at a 90 degree angle from the face of and affixed to a building or structure and extends twelve (12) inches or beyond the building wall, structure or parts thereof.
 - a. If flat, each face shall not exceed sixteen (16) square feet.

- b. The total area of a three-dimensional sign shall be determined by enclosing the largest cross section of the sign in an easily recognizable geometric shape (rectangle, triangle, parallelogram, circle, etc.) and computing its area which shall not exceed nine (9) sq. ft.
- c. Such sign must be hung at right angles, and shall not project beyond a vertical plane of two (2) feet inside the curb line.
- d. The bottom of said sign shall allow a ten (10) foot pedestrian clearance from sidewalk level.
- e. The top of the sign may be suspended in line with one of the following, whichever is the most successful application of scale, linear continuity and visibility as determined by the building inspector:
 1. Suspended between the bottom of sills of the first level of windows above the first story and the top of the doors or windows of the first story; or
 2. The lowest point of the roof of a one story bldg.
- f. An additional permit is required from the City Council to erect signs which overhang a public way.
- g. All signs overhanging a public way must be covered by an insurance policy naming the City of Lowell as co-insured and for such amounts as shall be established by the City.
14. Public Service Sign - is a sign located for the purpose of providing directions towards or indication of a use not readily visible from a public street (e.g. restrooms, telephone, etc.).
 - a. Such signs that are necessary for public safety and convenience shall not exceed four (4) square feet.
 - b. Such signs may bear no advertising.
 - c. Such signs are not included in computing total sign area allowed.
15. Roof Sign - a sign erected, constructed, or maintained above the roof of a building.
 - a. Roof signs are prohibited except by special permit by the Special Permit Granting Authority. Permit may be granted if it is the only feasible form of signing for that establishment.
 - b. Such signs shall be constructed entirely of metal or other approved non-combustible materials except as provided in Section 1408.5 of the State Building Code.
- c. All wiring and tubing shall be kept free and insulated therefrom.
- d. Such signs shall be set back at least three (3) feet from the face of the outside wall.
16. Temporary Sign - is a sign intended to be used for a period of no more than thirty (30) days.
 - a. Temporary signs pertaining to special sales or events may be displayed in no more than 30% of the window area.
 - b. No permit is required for temporary signs.
 - c. Temporary banner signs which overhang a public way must be covered by an insurance policy naming the City of Lowell as co-insured and for such amounts as shall be established by the City.
17. Wall Sign - is a sign which is attached parallel on the exterior surface of a building or structure.
 - a. A wall sign shall not project more than fifteen (15) inches from the building surface.
 - b. The sign shall not obscure architectural features of the building (including but not limited to cornices, lintels, transoms) to which the sign is attached.
 - c. Such signs shall not extend above the lowest point of the roof, nor beyond the ends of the wall to which it is attached.
 - d. Sign Size:
 1. Signs or advertising devices, attached to the building shall have an aggregate area not exceeding two square feet for each lineal foot of building face parallel or substantially parallel to a street lot line. Where a lot fronts on more than one street, the aggregate sign area facing each street frontage shall be calculated separately.
 2. Signs shall not be permitted on building walls not parallel or within 45 degrees of parallel to the street, except directional signs such as for entrances or parking each not exceeding three (3) square feet in area.
18. Window Sign - is a permanent non-illuminated sign painted on the inside glass of a window.
 - a. The total area of a window sign shall not exceed 30% of the total glass area.
 - b. Contents of such sign shall advertise only an on-premise use.

C. TABLE OF ALLOWED SIGN USES:

SIGN TYPE	ZONING DISTRICTS									
	S-1 S-2	M-1	M-2	M-3	B-1	B-2 B-2A	B-3	IA IP IPHR	IB	
ADDRESS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
AWNING	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
BILLBOARD	N	N	N	N	SP	SP	N	SP	SP	
COMMUNITY DIRECTORY	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
CONTRACTOR	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
FOR SALE/RENT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
FREESTANDING	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
ILLUMINATED	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
INDIVIDUAL LETTERS	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
MARQUEE	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
ACCESSORY	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
PAINTED WALL	N	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	
PERMANENT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
POLITICAL	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
PROJECTING	N	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	
PUBLIC SERVICE	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
ROOF	N	N	N	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	
TEMPORARY	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
WALL	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
WINDOW	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	SP	Y	Y	
ANY OTHER SIGN	N	N	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	SP	

c. Window signs on ground floor levels shall be included in calculating the total area of signs on the building frontage.

B. OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION FOR ALL DISTRICTS

CORNER BUILDINGS - if a building fronts two or more streets, the sign area for each street frontage shall be computed separately.

SETBACK REQUIREMENTS - unless otherwise specified in this Code, signs are exempt from setback requirements.

SUBLEVEL STOREFRONT - if the first floor of a building is substantially above street grade and the basement is only partially below street grade, separate occupants of each level may each have one-half the square feet of signage allowed if it were a single ground floor use.

SUPPORTS AND BRACKETS - for a sign shall not extend needlessly above the cornice line of the building to which the sign is attached.

TRADEMARKS - that are registered for a specific commodity may occupy no more than 10% of the sign area, except that said commodity is the major business conducted on the premise, then there shall be no such restriction.

C. TABLE OF ALLOWED SIGN USES (SEE ATTACHED PAGE)

D. PROHIBITED SIGNS

No person may erect a sign which:

1. Flashes, rotates, or has a motorized moving part that is visible from a public street.
2. Any sign which, by reason of its size, location, content, coloring or manner of illumination, constitutes a traffic hazard or a detriment to traffic safety in the opinion of the Building Inspector by obstructing the vision of drivers, or detracting from the visibility of any traffic sign or control device on public streets and roads.
3. Any sign which obstructs free ingress to or egress from a required door, window, fire escape or other required exit way of which obstructs a window, door or other opening for providing light or air or interferes with property function of the building.
4. Any sign or sign structure which:
 - a. Is structurally unsafe,
 - b. Constitutes a hazard to safety or health by reason of inadequate maintenance, dilapidation or abandonment,

c. Is not kept in good repair, or

d. Is capable of causing electrical shocks to persons likely to come in contact with it.

5. Signs which make use of words such as STOP, LOOK, DANGER, etc., or any phrases, symbols, or characters, in such a manner as to interfere with, mislead, or confuse traffic.

6. String lights used in connection with commercial premises for commercial purposes other than Christmas decorations.

7. Spinners, and streamers except as specified in Temporary Sign section.

8. Any sign now or hereafter existing which no longer advertises a bona fide business conducted or product sold. To be removed at owner's expense.

9. Is affixed to a fence, utility pole or structure, or tree, shrub, rock or other natural objects.

E. VARIANCE

An application for variance may be filed with the Board of Appeals as allowed in Section 31-16 and 31-26 of the Lowell Zoning Code.

F. SPECIAL PERMITS

Certain uses are designated in this Chapter as exceptions, requiring a Special Permit. Persons wishing to file for a Special Permit may refer to Section 31-15 of the Lowell Zoning Code.

Site plan requirements may be waived by the Special Permit Granting Authority.

G. MAINTENANCE

Each sign shall be maintained in a secure and safe condition. If the Building Inspector is of the opinion that a sign is not secure, safe or in good state of repair, it shall give written notice of this fact to the person responsible for the maintenance of the sign. If the defect in the sign is not corrected within the time permitted by the Building Inspector, the Building Inspector may revoke the permit to maintain the sign and may remove the sign and keep possession of same until the owner pays the cost of removal.

H. ENERGY SHORTAGE

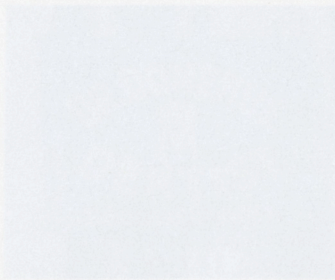
In the event of an energy shortage, the City is authorized in its discretion to order all signs in City consuming electricity, gas, oil or other energy, to cease consumption in whole or in part during such hours as for such period as designated.

I. NONCONFORMING SIGNS

Any sign or other advertising (billboard) devices heretofore legally erected may continue to be maintained, provided, however, that no such sign or other advertising device shall be permitted if it is enlarged and provided further, any such sign or other advertising device which has deteriorated to such an extent that the cost of restoration would exceed thirty five percent of the replacement cost of the sign or other advertising device at the time of the restoration shall not be repaired or rebuilt or altered. Any exemption provided in this section shall terminate with respect to any sign or other advertising device which:

1. Shall have been abandoned as set forth in this Code. See Section 31-20.

2. Shall not have been repaired or properly maintained within thirty (30) days after notice to that effect has been given by the Building Commissioner.



Signs are one of the most prominent visual elements of a street. If well designed, they add interest and variety to building facades and attract customers. On the other hand, signs more than any other single feature can detract from even the most attractive storefront if erected without care.

On January 29, 1987 the City of Lowell adopted its first comprehensive ordinance regulating the design and use of signs throughout the city. The sign code is part of the zoning ordinance and is administered according to its provisions. In adopting this ordinance, the City Council reaffirmed the importance of adequate protective measures in the city's nationally recognized historic district.

Downtown Lowell is undergoing a dramatic revitalization. Business owners are taking an active part in the effort, realizing that the attractive appearance of their buildings is essential to draw people to their stores.

Merchants and building owners are improving their buildings, peeling away old paint, and adding new storefront details. Where original storefronts are no longer available, they are being replaced with newly designed new storefronts. The new signage is an important part of many of these storefront improvements.

Lowell's historic district is one of the most important in the state. The city's historic district is one of the most important in the state.

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City officials and business owners are working together to create a more attractive downtown environment. The Lowell Sign Code is a key part of this effort. It does not suggest the removal of all signs from downtown Lowell, but it does limit merchants and building owners to one "correct" type of sign. The regulations are primarily concerned with governing the placement, size, and number of business signs. In an effort to eliminate the visual clutter and inefficiency resulting from uncontrolled signage.

Acknowledgements

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